

Ways to Uplift the Image of Tourism Sector of Bangladesh: Some Strategic Guidelines

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to inject some strategic guidelines to build a better image of Bangladesh as a tourist destination. I have conducted the investigation from both a theoretical and an empirical viewpoint. A two-stage systematic random sampling design is used to select about 100 respondents from foreign and local tourist. I have analyzed data by using the qualitative method. The tourism sector in Bangladesh is far behind from reaching its goal due to the inability to draw the attention of a good number of local and foreign tourists. This low rate of tourist attraction towards Bangladesh is mainly for image crisis and inadequate promotional measures of the tourism sector. In addition to that the security concern, the recent recurrent attack of the Islamic militant, infrastructure problem, wrongful reporting by international media and the perceived negative image by the potential tourists adversely affect the development of tourism in Bangladesh.

Key words: Tourism, Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Parjaton Corporation, Archaeological Sites, Sustainable Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is the heaven of nature. This geographical location and archaeological sites are termed as a vast natural garden having copious musical birds and countless rivers swarming with a variety of delicious fish. This country is like a painter's dream with a rich tapestry of colors, creed, and texture. The tourism sector of Bangladesh is pleading for natural, archaeological and attractions of eco-tourism. This country has the largest mangrove forest of the world located in Sundarban, the beautiful hills in Rangamati and in Bandarban, the mind blowing tea garden in Sylhet, the sights and sounds surrounding the livelihood of the indigenous people in the Chattagram Hill Tracts, the centuries-old mansions and villas belonging to the Maharajas of past civilizations, the excellent natural scenery of Foy's Lake, and the longest natural sea beach of the world situated in Cox's Bazar. More than forty years have elapsed of Bangladesh's tourism industry, yet, it is in a nascent position in comparison to the neighboring countries. Tourism in this country has been growing at a very sluggish pace though it has large potential to flourish. In the era of globalization Bangladesh is still unknown as a tourist destination in the international tourist market. If we look at the statistics, we will find that only about 03 lacks foreign tourists came to Bangladesh in 2010, of which more than 70% came for business, and official purposes and this number is not satisfactorily increasing (Bangladesh Parjaton Corporation). The slow development of the tourism

industry of Bangladesh is attributed to multiple reasons like less-prioritization, lack of budget, scarcity of trained people to serve this industry and strategic marketing activities. Till now this sector is lag behind in projecting the attraction of international tourists through advertisements in print and electronic media, as the neighboring countries like India, Nepal, and Bhutan do. These things ought to be prioritized to uplift the image and to introduce prime tourist spots as well as the vibrant culture of Bangladesh.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the image cataclysm in the tourism industry of Bangladesh.
- To inject the necessary guidelines for uplifting the image of the tourism sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academia and researchers have done a substantial number of works on tourism as a subject throughout the world but relatively a few work and literature on uplifting the image of Bangladesh as a tourist destination. Here I have identified some guidelines and reasons behind image crisis. Similarly, I have not found enough literature on the same area. Selbst (1978) in Booth, (1993) defines the image crisis of tourism as "any

action or failure to act that interferes with an organization's ongoing functions, the acceptable attainment of its objectives, its viability or survival, or that has a detrimental personal effect as perceived by the majority of its employees, clients or constituents". "The image crisis of tourism describes a situation where the root cause of an event is, to some extent, self-inflicted through such problems as inept management structures and practices or a failure to change" (Faulkner, 2001). "In the business context, image cataclysm of tourism is considered an event that damages a tourism sector reputation or drastically harms overall tourism goals of profitability, growth or survival" (Lerbinger, 1997). According to Fearn-Banks (1996), "the image crisis would be a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company, or tourism industry, as well as products, services, or good name." Faulkner (2001) argues that "Every crisis has some similar and essential characteristics, these include a significant triggering event, which challenges the existing structure, routine operations or survival of the tourism sector, high threat and short decision time and characterized by fluid, unstable, dynamic situations." In general, the tourism image crisis means any occurrence which can obstacle the normal operation and conduct of tourism-related business. It damages a tourist destination's overall reputation for safety, attractiveness, and comfort. The image problem affects a visitor's perception to a destination, and in turns, it causes a downturn in the local travel and interrupts the continuity of business operations for the travelers and tourism industry. Faulkner and Russell (1997) modified the definition and provided a working definition suited to the strategic marketing approach. As mentioned previously, tourism has increasingly suffered instances of image crises and disasters which have resulted in threats to the tourism industry itself and its contribution to development. "Tourism destinations in every corner of the globe face the virtual certainty of experiencing a disaster of one form or another at some point in their history" (Faulkner, 2001). Overall, the modern tourism industry is subject to the economic crisis, environmental disasters, health scares, political upheaval, terrorist activity, and warfare, which all influence the direction and scale of tourist flows. "Due to a crisis, the decline in the arrival of tourist to a destination is regarded as a function of their reaction to actual or perceived threats to their security, health or, their enjoyment of the holiday. That is, given the intangible nature of tourist experiences and the dominant motivational factors of escape or avoidance, the tourist decision process is heavily influenced by the image of a destination, which themselves may be affected by diverse factors, such as prior knowledge of the destination, travel experience, cultural influences and so on" (Money & Crotts, 2003). "Furthermore, a complex cause-effect relationship may exist between various elements of a tourism system, which means a major image crisis can potentially lead to some sub-crisis" (Sharpley, 2005). The individual organizations and particular sectors of the travel and tourism industry suffer from image crisis as well, which require immediate and appropriate responses of the authority. According to Ali (2004), we find that from the ancient period this geographical area is famous for scenic beauty. Foreign tourists praise this country for its wonderful natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and hospitality of the people. Ali &

Mohsin (2008) observed that "for Bangladesh- spots and cost of services has a positive impact on the tourism sector" Authors also suggested that tourism acts as an important ingredient of economic and social development of the country for which the authority should apply synergy between a tourism marketing plan and its implementation process. Integrated marketing communication channel will be useful to develop the tourism sector of the country. "Tourism planning is defined as a process based on research and evaluation, which seeks to optimize the potential contribution of tourism to human welfare and environmental quality" (Tosun & Jenkins, 1998). "Destination choice, image, and satisfaction have all been the subject of considerable tourism research" (McLellan & Foushee, 1983; Pyo et al., 1989; Selby & Morgan, 1996; Sirakaya et al., 1996). "In Bangladesh, the scope of nature-based tourism, research-based tourism, culture-based tourism, and eco-tourism is quite evident" (Shamsuddoha M, 2004). "Many prepared plans particularly at the central level to guide tourism development, as they have recognized the tourism sector as an important source of foreign currency earning and employment" (Cevat Tosun & Dallen J. Timothy, 2001). Kotler, Bowen & Maken (2004) described that "some of the major psychological determinants of demand for tourism include prestige, escape, sexual opportunity, education, social interaction, family bonding, relaxation, and self-discovery. These determinants can be used in segmentation variables and for tourism development". Hossain & Sultana (2006) depicted that "According to the recommendation of foreign tourist about Bangladesh, scenic beauty ranked first, cost of services second, the attitude of people third, and so on down to facilities ranking the tenth" "If Tourism is to be successful in the future, public and management must strive for all four goals: enhanced visitor contentment, improved economy and business sensation, sustainable resource utilization, and community and area integration" (Gunn with Var, 2002:105). "Undoubtedly, Bangladesh tourism sector has immense potential in the national and international arena" (Magnussen, 2010). Thus, tourism planning should be one of the main aims of national development planning, and only then the image will uplift to national and international tourists.

THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present study is explanatory. The researchers commonly use exploratory researches as initial research into a hypothetical or theoretical idea. In exploratory study, a researcher has the idea to observe something and seeks to understand more about it. This research helps to attempt to lay the groundwork that will lead to future studies or to determine the observation that might be explained by a currently existing literature. Exploratory research relies on secondary research technique such as reviewing available data. As the present study is followed by the exploratory research technique, so I have used lots of secondary material from various sources. For the collection of secondary data, the library of Parjatan Corporation and the web address of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation have acted as an important source. The existing literature includes published local and international journals, online journals, periodicals, newspaper articles, related magazines, related websites, etc. Different qualitative measures have been taken to analyze the collected data.

REASONS BEHIND THE IMAGE CRISIS OF BANGLADESH AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

Tourism sector of Bangladesh is suffering from the following image crises: There is a remarkable shortage of skilled human resources. At this moment, there is a crisis of proper tour guide in this sector. Because of the scarcity of skilled human resources and tour guides, it has become very intricate to run tourism business smoothly. Another biggest hurdle is the poor infrastructure of the country which has made this sector a hectic and unprofitable feat. There is a lacuna of regular policy direction. Due to the absence of proper policy direction, BPC or the private sector do not get any fund or loan from any quarter. The culture of revenue budget for the promotion of tourism development in the country has not yet started. In this country we find some flaws in the ways of categorizing the hotels and restaurants. Segmentation of the hotels and restaurants as Star or Non-Star is not under the jurisdiction of BPC. If Bangladesh government segments it properly, the tourist will get a better understanding about hotel and restaurant. Tourism awareness among the domestic people is the fact for image crisis of this sector. The geographical position of Bangladesh in respect of International tourist routes and lack of proper and suitable transport facilities for tourists are the reason for the image problem. Lack of adequate rules, regulation, and enactment, etc. for the development, operation and management of tourist resort and establishments are also the reason of image crisis. Tourism management and marketing are defective due to the absence of association of the coordinated agencies. Security systems of tourists are very vulnerable in our country. Unplanned tourist spots are the main problem for developing tourism in Bangladesh. Lack of social and political commitment, this sector is far behind from its goal. Unstable political situation and politicization of administration have created a bad image abroad, and that is the biggest threat to the expansion of the tourism industry. The continuous campaign against Bangladesh by certain quarters as a fundamentalist country and recent militant attacks is also the obstacles of building a better image.

STRATEGIC GUIDELINES FOR AMPLIFICATION OF TOURISM SECTOR OF BANGLADESH

Tourism sector of Bangladesh, bearing negative image cannot flourish to the optimum level. So all out efforts should be taken to build a better representation of the country as a tourist destination. The positive aspects, attractions, and beauty of this country should be promoted worldwide effectively. The media, including electronic and print media, online and different social media can help tremendously in the sustainable tourism industry. Also, the stated recommendations can be followed.

The political stability is a prime concern for tourist. For example, people do not think Iraq as a tourist destination because when they think about Iraq, the facts come in their mind are bombs, weapons, and murder. So political stability is a must for a peaceful tourist destination. It is now almost proved that without the co-operation of the private sector only government organization could not do business successfully. In this context, the private sector should come forward with the innovative idea for the development of the tourism sector. Bangladesh is far behind in infrastructure development in comparison with other

countries like Malaysia, the Maldives, India, and Singapore. So infrastructure development is a prime factor. There are complexities in visa issuing system for the foreign tourists. It also should be relaxed and ease.

Ensuring security is another major concern for the government. For example, many tourists feel insecure in walking in the sea beaches or staying in some remote tourist spots at night. Bangladesh is a land of scenic beauty with many ancient archaeological sites, but it is a matter of great regret that we are destroying these archaeological sites day by day. The Government of Bangladesh should show zero tolerance about this destruction and also should take the responsibility to look after these archaeological sites and natural beauties. Taste and choice of tourist differ from person to person. So tour operators and authority should offer diversified products to cater their demand.

Tourism, nowadays, is the multi-billion dollar industry that offers a wide range of job options both at home and abroad. To develop the image of the tourism sector, world-class human resources are the pressing need. It is a matter of joy that many institutions like the national hotel, tourism training center, and universities, both private and public, have come forward to develop human resource by offering various courses and training. An industry like tourism largely depends on the image of the country. All-out efforts should be made to overcome the problems relating to the negative image of the country, mostly on wrong perceived grounds. Tourist Information Center should be set up in large number. Due to the popularity of coastal resorts, the authority should develop some exclusive zone for the tourists, where facilities like, wine, women, dancing, gambling even everything would be available only for the foreign tourist. The tourism industry must not be viewed in isolation but is needed to integrate into the development plan. The arrangement of ships and boats should be kept ready to voyage in the deep sea as required by the tourists may be made. A live picture of catching Hilsa in the rivers can give the tourists great pleasure. The authority should ensure tight security all around the Sundarban and in the Hill Tracts areas. Personnel of Bangladesh missions in abroad should be motivated to inform foreign tourists about the country's attractive places and facilities. A separate department may be set up in each embassy that can work continuously to develop Bangladesh's image and provide up to date information to the foreigners. In priority basis the authority should establish some highly secured and restrictive red light areas for the tourists with a few restrictions and precautions. In each of the tourist zones, a superior communication system like the internet, digital phone, fax, wifi, etc. should be made available for the tourists. The government should undertake massive awareness campaign on tourism around the country with the help of elected public representatives. An Integrated Marketing Communication should be jointly enforced by the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation and the private tour operators on a PPP basis.

Smooth communication and transportation system should be developed all around the hill tracts where the arrangement of rope paves and toy trains can give a clear view of its beautiful nature to the tourists. It may provide them with immense pleasure to visit the hills and to see the untamed life from a very

close distance. The Parjatan Corporation may arrange accommodation for tourists in the houses of tribal people or very near their residence to give a clear understanding of their livelihood. Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh should be more consumers friendly and customize the tourist side by side the authority should build tourism superstructures in a planned and comprehensive manner. In Bangladesh, the scope of nature-based tourism, research-based tourism, culture-based tourism, and eco-tourism is quite evident. So the Tourism Ministry of this country needs to come out to be several defects in the planning approaches to tourism development. Coastal Zone Management (CZM) also needs to develop a planning device for promoting sustainable tourism. The government has formulated many tourism strategies, but not all have been integrated and supported by action. So it should be more visible and active. Strong leadership and guidelines are needed to substantially decrease tourism's carbon footprint generated from multiple sources including facility operations and transport-related greenhouse gas emissions. The tourism community is expected to be more inclusive of innovative and socially equitable approaches. This innovative approach must include active participation, mobilization of Indigenous communities, women, local professionals, designers as recognized and sustainable development leaders.

CONCLUSION

It is true that in spite of her rich cultural heritage and large natural capital base, Bangladesh is not capable of presenting a pleasant picture of her tourism industry. It has not been able to make proper use of her natural capital base to promote and develop the tourism industry. Less investment, lack of positive publicity, security of the tourist, lack of presentation of natural beauties, communication, infrastructure, and transportation problem and lack of international standard facilities and freedom of the tourist are the reasons of an image crisis. To solve the tourism-related obstacles and to uplift the image the government and the private sector should give priority to the paradigm of tourism development by providing more investment and facilities for the tourist. The authority should prioritize this industry and take necessary steps to uplift the image and then obviously will enable Bangladesh to get a reasonable share of the big cake provided by the largest and the fastest growing global tourism industry.

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